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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Employment of U.S. Air Power Over Cambodia  
Between 1 July and 15 August 1973

Overview

1. Current U.S. air activities in and over Cambodia fall into three broad (and different) categories: bombing by B-52s, close air support by other types of aircraft, and aerial transport of supplies and/or troops to isolated towns and/or units. Any deliberation of how best to utilize U.S. air power over Cambodia should take into consideration all three types of air activity. Each has played an important role in Cambodia, but with varying degrees of effectiveness.

2. In purely military terms, the B-52 bombing effort has been the least valuable, for several reasons.\* In general, there is a dearth of suitable targets in Cambodia such as massed forces and concentrated storage areas. The rules of engagement have restricted the use of B-52s in the relatively few areas where such targets do exist. Most important, however, we simply do not have enough high-quality targetting information to provide certain or even probable targets for many of the B-52 strikes now run against Cambodian territory. Close tactical air support, on the other hand, has been a critical factor in Cambodia in recent months -- saving a number of threatened cities and permitting the expansion of defensive perimeters around others. It has also been a vital factor in keeping open the Mekong and several of the major land routes to Phnom Penh. Finally, close air support gives important psychological encouragement to the Cambodian government and army, since it is a highly visible

\* Details on the size of the current U.S. B-52 and tactical air effort, its targets and goals, its effects and the effect of weather are at Annex.

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and effective form of U.S. support. The third category of U.S. air activity, aerial resupply, is just as important as tactical air support. It may in fact be more critical than tactical air support to the short term survivability of the present Cambodian government.\*\*

3. In addition to determining how best to employ U.S. air support between now and 15 August, consideration should also be given to how best to prepare the Cambodians for its inevitable loss. Although various options appear to exist -- massive use of air power until the 15th, a gradual reduction to wean the Cambodians from virtually total dependence on it, or some combination thereof -- a key determinant will be the worsening weather conditions.

#### Specific Recommendations

4. Our recommendations may be summarized as follows:

a. We do not believe any great benefit would be derived from a specific program aimed at "weaning" FANK of U.S. air support by gradually reducing the sortie rate during the period between now and 15 August. Some reduction in sorties during this period will be inevitable because of worsening weather and its impact on the targetting process. Hence an additional "weaning" reduction would be confusing and probably counter-productive.

b. Assuming that the goal of U.S. air activities during the next several weeks is to maximize FANK's ability to resist Communist offensive action, the best use of U.S. air power would be to concentrate our resources on direct support of FANK defenses and resupply

\*\* B-52 strikes and combat air support after 15 August would appear to be precluded by the Congressional Stricture against obligating or expending funds to finance "the involvement of United States military forces in hostilities in or over or from off the shores of North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia." Whether this prohibition also encompasses aerial resupply is something lawyers could, and probably will, debate.

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operations, backed up by day and night gunship armed reconnaissance along major Communist-controlled LOCs.\*\*\*

c. The continuation of B-52 strikes on the present scale is not warranted in light of their marginal effectiveness. The number of such strikes could be cut markedly (and their cost-effectiveness appreciably increased) if they were made only on the basis of reliable targetting information.

5. TACAIR -- TACAIR assets, especially gunships, will provide the most effective and reliable air umbrella for FANK, despite the limiting effects of the weather. Aerial interdiction efforts against road segments, bridges, and water crossings should be minimized and priority given to expanding FANK perimeters, supporting troops in contact, and providing better air cover for truck and waterborne supply convoys. More intensive and widespread armed reconnaissance against moving targets should be programmed to stem continuing enemy troop and supply movements. In addition, the increased use of the all-weather F-111 could reduce some of the effects of the bad weather, especially if timely intelligence on high priority targets is received.

6. B-52 Strikes -- The limited amount of information available on the results of B-52 strikes in Cambodia makes it difficult to reach a hard conclusion on their effectiveness. COMINT and other sources present a mixed picture. Some accounts show that hundreds of Communist troops have been killed -- along with many civilians -- and large tonnages of supplies have been destroyed in various parts of the country. But others indicate that very little damage has resulted from a great many strikes. In fact, some of the most vocal critics of B-52 strikes have been aerial spotter pilots who report on the results of such attacks.

7. It is our understanding from talking to the targetting analysts at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, that most B-52 targets are selected well in advance of the planned strikes, sometimes several weeks. By the time

\*\*\* Despite any planning for continued U.S. support of the small Cambodian air force after 15 August, it is almost certain that Khmer air support capabilities for the near term at least would be of only marginal benefit based on its recent performance.

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the B-52 attack is conducted, the target is often no longer there or has lost its importance. Thus, because of the great difficulty in validating B-52 targets -- weather, old or tenuous information -- and the modest results of past attacks, a cessation of ARC LIGHT strikes would have little impact on the course of events in Cambodia over the next six weeks unless valid, timely targets can be developed.

Argument for Gradual Reduction of Air Strikes

8. The argument for weaning FANK from its dependence on U.S. air support during the final six weeks by gradually reducing the sortie rate is a theoretical issue largely overtaken by practical considerations. Poor weather conditions already are causing numerous mission aborts and cancellations, which have subjected many FANK positions and convoys to a sample of things to come. Rainy weather and the knowledge of the upcoming bombing halt will, no doubt, restrain Communist offensive action during this period. Some reduction in U.S. operations probably will occur in any event due to a lack of good targets.

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ANNEX

U.S. Air Operations in Cambodia

The Size of the Current Effort

1. After the cessation of the bombing over North Vietnam and South Vietnam during January, and the subsequent halt over Laos in February, U.S. air operations in Cambodia sky-rocketed. During the four month period March-June 1973 the U.S. flew nearly 25,000 attack sorties (204 daily), more than ten times the number flown in Cambodia during the previous four-month period and even greater than the daily average during LINEBACKER as shown in the following tabulation.

	<u>Tactical Attack Sorties</u>	<u>B-52 Attack Sorties</u>	<u>Total</u>
March-June 1973	18,900	5,950	24,850
(Daily Average)	(155)	(49)	(204)
November 1972 - February 1973	1,900 (16)	470 (4)	2,370 (20)
LINEBACKER			
10 May 1972 - 15 January 1973	41,920 (167)	4,890 (19)	46,810 (186)

2. An even more striking comparison is the amount of ordnance dropped in Cambodia during the past four months compared to the roughly eight months of LINEBACKER. Because of the very high percentage of B-52 strikes in Cambodia, the amount of ordnance dropped since March (about 190,000 tons) is close to the total for all of LINEBACKER (210,000 tons). Besides the great quantitative increase in the U.S. air effort, U.S. air support in Cambodia was upgraded by the introduction of the F-111 bomber

on 12 March. Also, the employment of laser guided bombs has enabled pinpoint bombing of specific targets.

#### The Campaign: Its Targets and Goals

3. U.S. air support in Cambodia since March has had two separate goals, and these goals have influenced both the target selection and the area of attack. The first goal was to disrupt the flow of supplies moving through the northeast to the base areas along the Cambodian border for eventual delivery into South Vietnam. During March, April and May over half (roughly 55%) of the U.S. tactical strikes were aimed at supply interdiction. These strikes were conducted primarily against the major LOC's in the northeast and in the base areas along the Cambodian border adjacent to MR's 3 and 4 in South Vietnam. These strikes included both armed reconnaissance against targets of opportunity along the main Communist LOC's and planned B-52 strikes in the major Communist base areas. With the onset of the heavy rains in late May the number of interdiction strikes has fallen sharply, mainly because the North Vietnamese have greatly reduced supply shipments.

4. The second goal of the U.S. air campaign in Cambodia has been to support FANK and has included a variety of missions. Of crucial importance have been U.S. strikes in support of FANK troops engaged in combat. Although these strikes, predominantly tacair, have accounted for less than 10% of the U.S. air effort, they have been essential for FANK's survival. Another mission of critical importance to FANK during the past four months has been the air cover -- also predominantly tacair -- provided to river convoys attempting to reach Phnom Penh from South Vietnam and truck convoys carrying supplies on the major LOC's leading from the capital. Finally, thousands of B-52 strikes have been flown against selected targets such as suspected enemy base camps, storage areas, and troop concentrations throughout the country in an attempt to disrupt the enemy.

#### The Effects of the Campaign

5. Despite the intensity of the U.S. air effort, its results show a mixed picture. Without a doubt, U.S. air support has hurt the enemy and greatly boosted FANK morale. In areas where major fighting has erupted such as at the provincial capital of Takeo, U.S. tacair (and some B-52) support has been the balancing factor without which FANK probably would

have been overwhelmed. Because U.S. air support can be introduced quickly it has prevented the Communists from concentrating his forces and has inflicted (or threatened to inflict) substantial personnel and materiel losses to his field units.

6. The presence of U.S. air support also has been a major factor in persuading ship masters to venture up the Mekong. Without U.S. air support, FANK could not ensure safe passage of these convoys and the Communists would have a stranglehold on Phnom Penh. The same is true for truck convoys. Although the enemy has effectively interdicted every major LOC from Phnom Penh at some time, the temporary successes FANK has had in reopening the LOC's after they have been cut could not have been accomplished without U.S. air support.

7. U.S. C-130's and helicopters have played a very important role in supplying Cambodian cities as well as FANK army units in recent months. In the absence of such aerial resupply, the Khmer Insurgents would have achieved control by now over much more Cambodian territory than they have in fact been able to do. Airdrops have been successfully conducted at Svay Rieng, Kompong Thom, and smaller FANK outposts which have been cut off from overland resupply by the enemy. In the weeks to come, such airdrops may be even more important as heavy rains increase the difficulties of overland transport.

8. U.S. air support has proven essential to the FANK's survival. Furthermore, pilots have reported destroying hundreds of KI storage areas and COMINT has indicated that the Communists have at least some distributional problems. Nonetheless, air action has not prevented the Khmer Insurgents from expanding their areas of control or generally improving their military position.

9. In regard to the other major goal of the U.S. air campaign in Cambodia -- the interdiction of supplies moving to VC/NVA forces in South Vietnam -- the available intelligence also suggests only limited results. Despite claims of record number of truck kills (pilots reported over 750 trucks destroyed or damaged in Cambodia during March and April alone), COMINT and reports from aerial observers indicated a continuous movement of supplies through most enemy controlled areas of the country during much of the past dry season.

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The Use of Air Power Between Now and Mid-August: The Effects  
of Weather

10. The next few weeks constitute the height of the summer monsoon season, a period of torrential rains and very poor flying conditions. The harsh weather, more than any other factor, will limit the effectiveness of the bombing effort. All phases of the air campaign will suffer; visual and photo reconnaissance flights -- necessary for target planning and validation -- will be severely hampered, as will armed reconnaissance sorties against enemy LOC's, aerial escort of FANK supply convoys, and close air support for FANK.

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